

City Of Millbrae
Community Development Department
Planning Division

HIGH STANDARD OF DESIGN

(January 2007)

The City has high expectations for the design of all new development and redevelopment within Millbrae. These expectations are based upon policies contained in the Millbrae General Plan and provisions contained in the Millbrae Municipal Code. The resulting high standard of design is expected on everything from small ground-floor additions for single-family homes to large and complex mixed-use projects. An especially important category of projects is new businesses within the Downtown and other commercial areas because of the opportunities for new signage and storefront improvements that they present.

The process for achieving the desired design quality occurs through design review; therefore, design review is required on all projects. (This design review should not be confused with the plan check process required for a building permit in which compliance with the Building Code is determined.) Depending upon the scope of the project, the required design review may be performed by Planning staff or by the Planning Commission. In either case, it is very important that project applicants make good design a priority when preparing their plans for submittal to the City. To do this, applicants should hire design professionals with the appropriate expertise to utilize both the Zoning Ordinance (for technical requirements) and any design guidelines (for aesthetic considerations), which may also exist for their type of project.

By ordinance, City staff and the Commission share discretionary authority to review, comment upon, and approve/deny various kinds development proposals. Millbrae Municipal Code Section 10.05.1150 “Architectural, Landscaping, and Site Plan Consideration” contains the following provisions:

1. All applications for a permit to construct a new building or to alter the exterior of an existing building are subject to architectural review. Interior modifications that do not impact the exterior are exempt from design review, but may still require a building permit. Architectural review also includes landscaping.
2. Architectural review for single-family, duplex, triplex, and multifamily (4 or more units) development shall utilize the “Residential Design Review Guidelines”.
3. Architectural review for non-residential development shall be based upon guidance provided by Planning staff and/or the Planning Commission.
4. Planning Staff Architectural Review. Each application for a building permit to construct a new building or to alter the exterior of an existing building shall first be reviewed by staff for

design quality. The applicant shall provide the plans, exhibits, and documentation needed by staff to determine whether the proposal complies with City policies, regulations, and guidelines. Plans shall clearly and accurately depict the location, nature, and extent of the work proposed and its relationship to the surrounding built environment. If the submittal does not fully depict the proposed work, the Community Development Director may require that the plans be redrawn and that no further review occur until such plans are resubmitted. Buildings which would have excessive bulk compared to others nearby, or would have a significant impact on neighboring views, privacy, or sunlight, or simply lack good design, may be referred, at the applicant's expense, to the City's design consultant for more in-depth review. As a result of the consultant's analysis, staff may direct the applicant to change the proposed design as necessary to mitigate undesirable impacts and/or improve compatibility with the area. If agreement to do so cannot be reached at the staff level, the proposal will be referred to the Planning Commission for final action and no permits will be issued while Commission review is in progress.

5. Planning Commission Architectural Review. Each development application that, by ordinance, requires approval by the Planning Commission shall also receive architectural review by the Planning Commission. The applicant shall provide the plans, exhibits, and documentation indicated by staff on the submittal requirements checklist appropriate for the project and supplemental information may be required by the Commission during its review. The Commission may approve, approve with conditions, or deny part or all of the project. For approval, the Commission must find that the project meets ALL of the following:

- The architectural, landscaping, and general appearance of the proposed building or structure and grounds are in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.
- The plans comply with the intent of adopted design guidelines and regulations.
- The project will not cause a significant visual impact to neighboring views from principal rooms of a residence (unless it is proven by the applicant that there is no other viable or cost-effective alternative).
- The proposal is not detrimental to the orderly, harmonious and safe development of the city and will not impair the desirability of investment or occupation in the neighborhood in which the building or structure is proposed to be erected.

If approved, the approval is typically effective for 1 year from the date of approval. Any approvals granted become automatically null and void if not used (by applying for a building permit) or extended (by applying to the Planning Commission) before the expiration date.

If approved with conditions or if denied, the applicant (or anyone) may appeal the Commission's decision to the City Council, but must file the appeal within the appeal period (which is usually 10 calendar days).